

POCKET PC EXPERT

FAQ

Q What's the difference between the various types of Pocket PC screen?

A Excluding Phone Edition devices, which have slightly smaller, lower-resolution screens, Pocket PC displays have two variants. Physical screen sizes vary between models, but are usually between 3½ and 4" (89 and 102mm), measured diagonally across the entire active area of the display.

The original Pocket PC specification was for a screen size of 240 pixels wide by 320 pixels high, sometimes referred to as QVGA or quarter-VGA. Most Pocket PCs still use this resolution, but just over a year ago certain manufacturers introduced models with full VGA screens, using 480x640 pixel resolution. These use the same range of sizes as standard QVGA screens, but provide a sharper display that's easier on the eyes.

Some early Pocket PC models came with monochrome screens, and there were a few different screen technologies in use, but all recent models use the same TFT technology, so there's currently little variation in quality between different makes and models.

Steve Clack

Handheld consultant,
trainer and editor



pocketpc@computershopper.co.uk

Windows Mobile 5.0

Windows Mobile has received a facelift, but do its enhancements benefit handheld users? **Steve Clack** lifts the lid on Microsoft's latest operating system

The Pocket PC operating system has undergone a handful of updates over the years, but there have been surprisingly few notable improvements, something for which Microsoft has been justifiably criticised. The latest update, Windows Mobile 5.0, which was introduced late last year, looks like an impressive upgrade at first glance, but what does it actually offer beyond its Windows Mobile 2003 SE predecessor?

The interface has clearly been given a polish. There is a new graduated blue navigation bar along the top of the screen and a command bar along the bottom. The menus are rearranged a little too, with the main menu system for most applications accessed from a pop-up at the bottom right of the command bar, and view/navigation-related settings available from a pop-up at the bottom left. A third pop-up at the centre of the command bar provides instant access to your selected input choice, with an adjacent pop-up menu from which you can quickly switch input methods.

The overall look is cleaner and a lot less cluttered. However, it's questionable whether or not this new menu arrangement is an improvement on the old system, particularly as most menu options require an extra tap in order to access them.

HELPING HAND

There are other, more subtle changes within the operating system, and some of these certainly make things easier for novices, with clearer navigation and improved setup screens. There's also a handy lock feature built into the Today screen, which protects against inadvertent screen taps until the lock icon is tapped again to enable screen access. Available internal memory is now allocated with a set amount for program execution and the remainder for storage, rather than using a shared allocation that can be changed by the user, which was always a little confusing.

The core word-processing and spreadsheet applications have been given some much-needed enhancements. Pocket Word, renamed Word Mobile, can create numbered lists as well as bulleted ones, and can display tables and embedded images in files imported from your PC desktop, although you can't add these directly in the handheld application.

Unfortunately, compatibility with desktop Word and Excel files is as poor as it has ever been. Any formatting that's not supported directly by the

handheld application is unceremoniously stripped from the document as soon as it's resaved in the corresponding handheld application.

Pocket Excel (now called Excel Mobile) has a basic charting facility. Column, bar, line, pie, scatter and area graphs are supported and a straightforward wizard walks you through the steps of creating each chart. A brand new application, PowerPoint Mobile, allows desktop PowerPoint files to be viewed on the handheld, but you can't create new files or even edit those you have imported from the desktop. The viewer also doesn't support some of the features of PowerPoint on the desktop, such as slide notes.

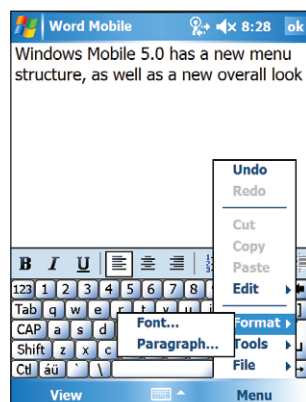
Under the hood, Windows Mobile 5.0 is the first version of the operating system to support devices with non-volatile memory and those with internal hard disks, both technologies that we'll be seeing more of in handheld devices in the future.

OUTSIDE IN

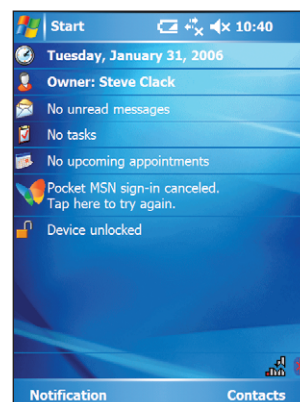
As with most previous Pocket PC updates, all third-party applications must be modified to work with Windows Mobile 5.0. Although most mainstream software has had the necessary tweaks, you should check all your important add-on software is compatible before considering the purchase of a new Windows Mobile 5.0 machine. Although some older devices can, in principle, be updated to run the new operating system, the upgrade is currently available for only a handful of models.

Only devices with sufficient available ROM space can be upgraded, so visit your manufacturer's website to check whether your particular model fits the criteria and if the upgrade is currently available. If it is, be sure to follow the upgrade instructions carefully, as the process entails a full backup of your existing data, which will be wiped from the machine during the upgrade process, restoring your handheld to its factory settings.

For most of us, Windows Mobile 5.0 isn't enough of a change to warrant upgrading, particularly if it involves buying new hardware. However, all new devices are shipping with the new operating system, so if you need to buy a new Pocket PC you have no choice, and must accept that a few of your cherished third-party applications may not work under Windows Mobile 5.0. If this is your first Pocket PC device, be sure to check for compatibility before downloading new software.



◀ Windows Mobile 5.0 uses a new menu layout, designed chiefly to make life a little easier for novices



◀ The Today screen has been given a spring clean, with the addition of a new screen lock feature

NATARA DayNotez

★★★★★

\$20 (around £11) or \$35 (around £20)
with PC desktop companion

Keeping a personal journal can be rewarding and useful. If you store it on your handheld, you get the benefit of easy searches. It only takes a few seconds to see what you were doing on a particular day, and you can quickly pull up a list of, say, all the cinema visits you've made in the past year. What's more, if you choose to keep your memoirs private, it's that much easier when the information is in electronic form.

It's possible to use the built-in Calendar application to store such notes, but most people don't want this historic data cluttering up the information they need on their day-to-day agenda. DayNotez is the perfect way to keep a detailed diary on your PDA. A longstanding favourite among Palm handheld users, it has now been ported to the Pocket PC operating system. You can enter unlimited text for each entry, and each one is time- and date-stamped automatically. When creating entries, text can be formatted

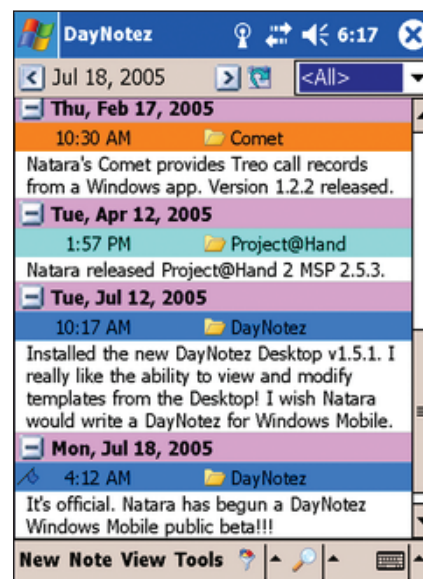
using emphases such as bold, underline and italics, and you can also use paragraph alignment, bulleted lists, indents and a variety of font attributes. If you want to separate entries, perhaps with work and personal items in different categories, it's a simple matter to create as many as you wish and then select the desired category from a pop-up menu. Once the data is entered, a powerful filtering system makes it easy to show a list of all the entries containing a specific word or phrase, in chronological order with a time and date shown for each item. Filters can be given descriptive names and saved for use again later, which is a powerful feature.

No option is available to import or export DayNotez information directly on the handheld, other than via the standard clipboard, but there's an optional Windows desktop companion application that synchronises all the information via ActiveSync and provides full import and export to and from PC-based applications.

SUMMARY

- ✓ Comprehensive
- ✓ Powerful filtering system
- ✗ No option to add images
- ✗ You can't attach files

DETAILS www.natara.com



▲ DayNotez, the perfect way to keep a personal diary on your Pocket PC

Aside from not being able to add sketches, photographs or other file attachments, which would be a useful feature, DayNotez provides all the tools you need to enter, view and manipulate your personal journal. If you want to keep your life story on your Pocket PC, look no further than DayNotez.

SPB SOFTWARE HOUSE

Spb AirIslands

★★★★★

\$20 (around £11)

Spb AirIslands is not what it seems. Opening up the game reveals a simulation in the style of Sim City, where you're tasked with building a civilisation from scratch, gathering resources and constructing a variety of buildings to grow your community of virtual humans. The background story involves the rebuilding of a collapsed civilisation of islands, suspended in the sky by 'gravitators'. Your main objective is to rebuild the gravitators, but this requires you to get the community together to gather the wood, bricks and water needed to generate enough money to pay for the construction.

The simulation requires all the usual skills to manage and foster its growth, but the twist to the game comes from the means used to accumulate the resources. Rather than making all this an integral part of the simulation, you're taken off to three separate arcade-style games to build up your supplies, one each for wood, water and bricks. Wood gathering takes the form of Xonix II, where you must cut the onscreen wood block into pieces using a laser cutter, tapping the screen to change the direction of the cutter, which you must do to prevent it colliding with

various obstacles, such as moving ball bearings and various tools. This is addictive, although play gets quite difficult as the levels progress.

For water gathering, you're directed to Bubbles. This is Spb's variant of a game that involves firing coloured balls from the bottom of the screen to make groups of three or more adjacent balls of the same colour, thus clearing the play area to stay alive. It's good fun, but the weakest of the three sub-components of AirIslands, and the one you're most likely to get bored with.

Arkaball II is your route to brick collection and is a superb variant of Breakout. Move your bat along the bottom of the screen to deflect the rebounding ball and clear the screen of bricks. The usual power-ups are all there, adding a variety of help and hindrance along the way, such as an integral machine gun for your bat, extra balls and a wider or narrower bat.

Combining four games in one, AirIslands is excellent value. But if you're not too keen on one of the three component arcade games you may lose interest in the game as a whole. While you can trade resources,



▲ AirIslands is great value, providing you with four games in one

such as selling water to buy bricks, the quantity available for trade is often small, so you may end up playing your least-favourite game more often than you like. Still, it's good to see a clutch of games grouped together in such an original fashion; this may be the start of a new genre. **CS**

SUMMARY

- ✓ Great graphics
- ✓ Excellent value
- ✓ Original concept
- ✗ You may not like all the games

DETAILS www.spbsoftwarehouse.com